

Dance has been a lifelong companion to Thomas Bangalter. The French musician, composer, producer, and DJ, known to millions as one half of the former house music duo Daft Punk, was introduced to the art form by his mother, a ballet dancer, and raised to the sounds of the disco hits penned by his songwriter father. Young Thomas' first piano lessons were delivered by a rehearsal pianist at the Paris Opera, whose day job entailed playing for ballet classes. "My childhood was surrounded with a dancing class and choreographers and dancers," he tells Apple Music Radio's Alexis Ffrench. Small wonder that he said yes when choreographer Angelin Preljocaj invited him to compose a full-length ballet for Ballet Preljocaj and the Ballet de l'Opéra de Bordeaux.

*Mythologies*, first staged in July 2022 at Bordeaux's Grand Théâtre and recorded at the time by the Orchestre National Bordeaux Aquitaine and conductor Romain Dumas, marks a bold creative leap for Bangalter. The ballet evokes ancient and modern myth to explore the timeless nature and enduring relevance of ritual, matters deeply rooted in the collective imagination. Although its composer had never written for orchestra before, working with dancers felt like a homecoming. "This was a very intimate and personal project for sure, to go back there in this process," he observes. "I think I look at scoring and writing for the orchestra in a very cinematic way too, because I just love movies and think my relationship to classical composers is connected to the way their music is used in films."

Bangalter began by drafting 23 dance movements, striking a balance between music driven by rhythmic refrains and pieces hallmarked by heartfelt lyricism. "I've always liked the idea of contrast," he reflects. "And it's true that one idea for me very clearly was to encapsulate both the lyrical forms as well as more minimalist and repetitive forms as well. I don't see them so much as opposites, and that's what I liked, this idea of making them coexist within the structure of the ballet."

He prepared for the practical business of scoring his dances by immersing himself in evergreen manuals of orchestration by Berlioz and Rimsky-Korsakov. "I wanted to get a sense of the rules to follow and the rules to break," he notes. Ravel's orchestration of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* supplied handy examples of both. "Here was this opportunity for me to experiment with orchestration at a very novice and instinctive level. So I was just experimenting and trying different textures and working with some classical forms and also some less traditional forms as well."

What inspired him to compose *Mythologies*? "It's a hard question to answer for me, because my process is very instinctive," he comments. "At the same time, this project was my first adventure in orchestration. I had the opportunity in the past to work with orchestra, and I was working with some film scores or for some Daft Punk music with very talented arrangers and orchestrators. I'm just very grateful after these decades of music to have the opportunity to reinvent my relationship to writing, to reassess my relationship to technology as well."

After years of using electronics as a mode of expression, it proved a refreshing change for Bangalter to write solely for acoustic instruments. "It was very calming," he recalls. "It was lockdown-compatible, I would say, too. But I really appreciated that process." His ballet's essential spirit courses through its 10th movement, "L'Accouchement," an impassioned meditation for strings flecked with exquisite wind and percussion colors. "I think it encapsulates this idea of tension and release and this peaceful state that rises towards the end of the piece. 'L'Accouchement' is the French term for the labour of giving birth; it's maybe also a metaphor for the tormented aspect of creation. But I don't really like to explain too much the process rather than listen and let the music do the talking.